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MATHEMATICAL ACTIVITIES IN ISRAEL

BY

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## MATHEMATICAL ACTIVITIES IN ISRAEL

### INTRODUCTION

Israel is, both in the political and the scientific sense, an isolated singular point. It is almost certainly no exaggeration to assert that there is not a single major field of scientific activity in which Israel's four hostile neighbors, which hem her in on three sides against the Mediterranean, are as productive, in combination, as this small and harassed nation of less than three million. Indeed, one must go quite far in any direction before reaching another nation with a comparable level (either gross or per capita) of scientific accomplishment. Although the picture is far from one of unalloyed optimism -- as is quite clear from the subsequent material in this report -- it is quite proper to begin by describing my overall impression, based on a recent visit, as one of astonishment and awe.

The economic, political, and military stresses which torment Israel, as well as the extremely trying problems associated with the attempt to weld a nation out of immigrant groups, drawn from a hundred different nations, with dozens of different native languages, cultural backgrounds, and degrees of religious commitment, need not be dwelt on here, but they should be kept constantly in mind when trying to assess the accomplishments, failures, and prospects of this unique nation.

It will almost certainly be found helpful to read this report in conjunction with reports ONRL-23-66 and ONRL-24-66, written by colleagues who have also recently visited Israel.

### The Universities of Israel

At the present time Israel contains four universities: the Hebrew University of Jerusalem; the Technion (Israel Institute of Technology), which is located in Haifa; the University of Tel-Aviv, which is actually located in the suburb of Ramat-Aviv; and Bar-Ilan University, located in Ramat-Gan, a rather large outer suburb of Tel-Aviv. The first three of these institutions are distinctly secular in nature, although the Hebrew University supports a serious scholarly effort in Jewish history and philosophy. Bar-Ilan, on the other hand, has been established by the orthodox community with the intention of demonstrating that serious secular scholarship can be carried out successfully in a milieu of devoutness; perhaps the desire to shield religiously-inclined young people from the rather free-thinking attitudes manifested at the other universities also played an important role in the decision to found

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